The Unitarian Christian

Vol. 10 DECEMBER, 1954 No. 2

LIBRARY
STARR KING SCHOOL
NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM BUILDING

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION
By Henry Hallam Saunderson

CHRISTMAS AND THE UNCOMMON MAN
By Ford Lewis

JESUS AND MODERN MAN
Contributed

CHRISTMAS — THEN AND NOW
By Richard D. Pierce

CALLING A NEW MINISTER

GOING TO BETHLEHEM
By Charles C. Forman

31457

EDITORIAL

"What right have these Unitarians to observe Christmas?" That is an old question, musty, stale, and tired. It still occasionally sticks up its head, like Proteus rising from the sea. There is no hope apparently of answering it once for all; but we can always try.

At the end of the second century the great majority of Christians, the rank and file, were Monarchian or Monotheistic Christians. God is the Sole Monarch. Jesus, though born of a Virgin, was a human being. At his baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon him and enlightened him as to God's nature and will. Therefore the subsequent teachings of this Enlightened Jesus were authoritative; obedience to them was the only qualification for that union with Jesus in baptism by which a man is saved.

On the other hand, a group of theologians were doing their best to advocate another type of Christianity. God was the Pleroma, the Eternal Fulness of life and light, forever giving off waves, emanations of Himself. Chief of these Emanations was Jesus, the Logos, Word of God made flesh. Trinitarianism lent itself to their purposes, and they made the most of it. The fact that Jesus says not a word about Pleroma, or Logos, or Tri-une Godhead, or Second Person of the Trinity bothered them not a bit. He had no more conception of his own significance in the Divine Scheme than we have of ours. Only subsequent events could reveal that significance. What he himself said or failed to say was of no consequence. It was reserved for them, living in the light of subsequent history, to discover who and what he was, to invest him with his majesty, and to inform the world of his indispensable agency in the salvation of men.

From that day to this, these two types of Christianity have, more or less harmoniously, co-existed. First: Christianity is the religion of Jesus himself, his thought, belief and prayer, recaptured as fully as possible from his words in the Synoptic Gospels. Second: Christianity is the theological fabric erected by others concerning, or in behalf of, the helpless figure of Jesus. Unitarian Christians prefer to trace their descent from the earlier Monotheistic type of Christianity. They claim that their definition of Christianity as the personal religion of Jesus, awakened to life in their hearts, is the more valid; and that their right to observe the birth of Jesus is at least as valid; in point of time, more so, since the first Christians were without exception Unitarians.

C. E. P.

With two exceptions no one denies that there was a human phase in the life of Jesus. The Docetics claim that his human existence was not really human, only a seeming. He seemed to suffer his agony and crucifixion, but there was no real suffering. The followers of Arthur Drews and his school claim that no such man ever existed; Jesus is a myth.

As Unitarians our concern is to keep in true perspective the human phase in the life of Jesus, his teachings, his example, and his personal religion. He had a religion, a thought of God, a moral incentive, and a manner of worship. This religion of his is what we mean by the word "Christianity." Our purpose is to preserve and strengthen this Christian essence of Unitarianism.

The Fatherhood of God.
The Brotherhood of Man.
The Leadership of Jesus.
Salvation by Character.
The Progress of Mankind,
onward and upward Forever.

THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN is published four times a year in October, December, March and May, by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship. (Dr. Amos B. Horlacher, *President;* Rev. Paul Harmon Chapman, *Vice President;* Miss Katharine A. Parker, *Recording Secretary;* Mr. Ralph Lazzaro, *Corresponding Secretary.*)

Editorial Board: Rev. Charles E. Park, D. D., Chairman. Rev. Carl Bihldorff, Rev. Carl A. Seaward, Rev. Henry Hallam Saunderson, D. D., Rev. Alexander Szent-Ivanyi, D. D., Rev. Heinz Rettig, Mrs. Herbert Lyman and Constant Wendell.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: for magazine only, $1.00 a year payable to Treasurer, Constant Wendell, Unitarian Christian Publication Office, 102 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Mass.

Copies of the UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN in quantity are available for distribution in local parishes for literature tables. Apply to Publication Office, 102 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Mass.

Articles for publication in this periodical are welcome for consideration from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity. Submit to Rev. Charles E. Park, D. D., Editor-in-Chief, 347 Marlborough Street, Boston 15, Mass.

Entered as second class matter at Boston Post Office, Oct. 25, 1954.

SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCK BY NIGHT

A Christmas Meditation — Henry Hallam Saunderson

In the Gospel according to Luke we read the exquisite story of the birth of the one who was to be God's Messiah for the whole world. It begins with the contrast between arrogant power and humility—but the humility coupled with spiritual power. "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." And, as all men must go to their ancestral homes for this taxation, Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There Mary "brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." Thus is stated briefly the contrast between the Emperor of Rome and Mary's child.

Then the author of the story must decide who, on earth, should receive the heavenly news of the birth of the Messiah. And he chooses a little group of shepherds, out on a hilltop, watching over their flocks by night. Why did he choose the shepherds?

By the creative power of your imagination, build this picture. You go out toward evening and seat yourself on the dome of a little treeless hill. You look out over wide valleys, and see human habitations, and fields and roads. As twilight comes you see the light of lamps in windows. But soon a silvery mist begins to form in the lowlands, and to spread over the landscape. As darkness deepens, all that was visible of the earth is submerged except the dome of the hill where you are seated. You appear to be above the clouds.

The night is moonless, but the stars are brilliant. You call by name star after star, and constellation after constellation. *By day we know that we live in a world; but only by night do we discover that we live in a universe.* This discovery of the universe may well change the direction of our thought. We look not merely outward but necessarily upward. It may change our mood as we meditate. In the world we may see confusion and distress; and in the universe of stars we see order, magnitude and magnificence. The thought may come to us that above all strife is an everlasting peace.

Palestine, in which is the little town of Bethlehem, is a country of hills and valleys. From the very early times men have chosen the lowlands for their fields when they began the cultivation of the soil; and other men have turned to the rough hills for pasture-lands. Thus it was that the men who lived in the lower lands were often hidden in mist while the shepherds on the hills gazed in wonder at the stars. Some of these star-gazers meditated on the nature of God, and shaped the thought that God was like themselves: a watcher over his flock. "The Lord is my shepherd" is not a chance thought.

Thus it was natural that, when Luke wanted to choose men who would be most likely to hear the heavenly message, announcing the birth of the Christ, men whose hearts would respond to the meaning of the divine message, he decided to have a chorus of angels come to a hilltop where shepherds were watching over their flocks and were star-gazing. And so it is written that a heavenly messenger said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And then an angelic chorus sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The message was not entrusted to priests, or money-changers, or the tax-collectors or men in the marketplace. If these men had heard the message at all they might have said, "This is good news for *our* people." But the good news was for *all* peoples, for every race of men in all the world. The shepherds had at least a beginning of the idea of universality. They were lifted somewhat above the limitations of what was merely local and temporal. Christ had come to bring a faith for the whole world and peace in the entire earth.

When the shepherds received this message they hastened to Bethlehem, and found the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Christmas comes to us again and repeats the old story, forever new, of joy and peace for all peoples.

CHRISTMAS AND THE UNCOMMON MAN

by Ford Lewis

Something there is in the Christmas spirit which cuts across all artificial distinctions men make among themselves and speaks to mankind as a whole. There is a levelling experience in this genial holiday which erases for the moment all evidence of class and makes the many one. We get a glimmering of the meaning of good will. "Caught up in the spirit of the season," writes a liberal clergyman, "it can be a time when we rise to humanity's best, and see for a day the spirit that may yet mark all human relationships for all times."

Most of us spend our lives among average people. Most of us *are* average people, if such a term can be used to describe a community of unique human souls. But we tend to forget our common origin and heritage and it takes the warmth of old festivals to bring us back. Christmas belongs to the common man.

In another and even more significant way, however, this holiday belongs to the uncommon man. It takes its name from a very uncommon man. It requires an uncommon man to celebrate it in its true spirit. It lifts us all, in spite of sentimentality and commercialism, to uncommon moods of altruism and sacrifice. After all, who is this common man about whom we have heard so much in the last two decades? I confess that I have never met anyone who identified himself in just those terms. I would not know how to describe a common man, any more than I would know how to single out a bona fide member of "the masses." They are like people from Mars—much written about, but never writing; much spoken of, but never themselves coming forward to speak in their own behalf.

Jesus lived and moved among the ordinary people of Palestine, but he was far from ordinary himself. His life was cast among fishermen and craftsmen, small tradesmen and petty officials, but he led a very uncommon life in their midst. Yet he did not hold himself superior to them. He defended friend and stranger alike from charges of immorality, yet there is no record that he was accused of immorality. He never lost sight of common people and their needs, but he never became common and ordinary himself.

Jesus was a young man on his way to something bigger. Nearly everyone agrees that he had some kind of messianic notions about himself. He may have been deluded about himself. People with a sense of mission always run that risk. But the point is he was endowed with a burning sense of personal duty. Many people are able to see that the times have gone awry at many points. Jesus went farther and blessed the day that he was born to set them right.

There is a marvelous passage from the Sermon on the Mount in which he says "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Those who heard him must have wondered, in the split second between this sentence and the next, what he was going to add. What could he possibly say that would improve this very workable ethical principle? ". . . I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. . . ." Here was an uncommon teaching, indeed. "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? . . . You therefore, must be perfect. . ."

Jesus here affirms his faith in human nature, a faith which we share in our own tradition. There is a general retreat among us, however, from the earlier Unitarian belief in the perfectability of man. The uncertainty of the times causes the strongest optimist to doubt. The dream of human perfection is all but lost. The reality of the more perfect world may be forever lost, too, unless we can recapture the vision. Many religious liberals are certain we are going backward and downward at a pretty fast rate.

Our motto, "Onward and Upward Forever," was never intended to describe the inevitability of progress, but the *possibility*. Nothing good goes forward without a lot of hard work. It is the statement of a bold hope. Here in one pithy phrase we have the goal itself as well as the inspiration for the task. It tells us not what inevitably must come to pass, but what *ought* to. It is this quality of "oughtness" that will appeal to the uncommon man. It implies a gap to be bridged between present fact and possible future.

Another mark of the uncommon man is his ability to translate his ideals into action. It is easy, yea, pleasant to make high plans in a moment of enthusiasm. It is harder to carry them out. It is easy to commit ourselves to good causes which make demands upon us, but it is quite another thing to follow out our commitments in the routine weeks and months that follow, after enthusiasm slackens. Jesus gives the cue for the way of life that is "out beyond" when he says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, thats leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Common interpretation has made this mean that the easy road leads to hell and the high road to heaven. This meaning comes from a superficial reading of the lines. The key word is "enter." No gate is too narrow unless entrance is attempted. And all gates are narrow at the moment of entrance, otherwise they are not gates. Two swimmers, one an expert and the other a novice, may stand poised on the edge of a pool ready to dive in. Standing there together at the water's edge, there is no way of telling them apart. It is a question of "Which twin has the Toni?" But once the whistle has blown and they have dived in, there is no longer any question. The uncommon swimmer forges ahead of the average swimmer. He had been prepared by a high discipline for the grueling pace. He has entered into his sport by the narrow gate of training—hard, rigorous training—the gate which only a few of us find.

Jesus was right about the difficulty of it. Truly, the way is hard. We must learn to "scorn delights and live laborious days," (Milton, *Lycidas*) sure in the knowledge that what we are seeking is worth it. The easy way is the most attractive, and it offers the security of numbers. The crowd seems to offer a kind of safety and repose; so we like to do what the most people are doing. This principle operates as the tyranny of the average. So it is in all our lives. We drive cars which come off the same assembly line, wear clothes fashioned by the same tailor, go to the same schools, read the same books, see the same shows. But in our ethical and devotional lives there are vast differences. The deeper security comes from knowing we have done our best, no matter what the "average man" has done. The person who has really entered into life by the narrow gate of unselfish love stands out in any gathering of common men. The common man will appeal to an average to justify his mediocrity. The uncommon man is his own yardstick.

Jesus' contemporaries were understandably skeptical when they posed a natural question, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" It was exceedingly stony soil. We ask ourselves the same question, sometimes despairing of a happy answer. Can any good come out of us? Does anything we might do or fail to do really matter? Our anxiety is needless. It is the quality, not the quantity of our influence that matters. Each of us has his own little sphere, and there is enough challenge in the humblest occupation to develop the great qualities, if we but see it. What really counts is this—does life bring out the best in us —or get the better of us?

And this depends on whether we are common or uncommen men. It is one thing to live agreeably in the world. It is another to be swamped and smothered by its values. The superior man allows others to have their common standards without an air of condescension or appearing "holier than thou." But he requires uncommon performance of himself. Thus we must revise the Marxian formula "From each according to his ability—to each according to his need." Let it read "From myself according to my ability—to others according to their needs."

We shall hear much said during this happy holiday season of the miraculous birth, the gifts of the Magi, the worshipping of the shepherds and the divinity of Jesus. All birth is a divinely miraculous event important enough to fill the heavens with singing. All children are worthy of the most precious gifts our love and wisdom can bestow upon them. All children are worthy of the veneration symbolized by the shepherds. And all humanity has a sublimity of soul that is little short of divine. The lesson of the life of Jesus is that human life is not common. Mankind comes from afar "trailing clouds of glory." The star that rises with any new born infant "hath elsewhere had its setting," and when it sets at the end of his life, will rise again in the perennial wonder and surprise of God revealing himself in the soul of man.

JESUS AND MODERN MAN

About once in every generation the ghost of Arthur Drews and his school rises and walks the earth for a few years. The same cynical leer is on his lips; and the same sardonic words issue from his mouth: "Jesus is a myth. There never was such a man. The Gospels are a deliberate fabrication." With each appearance the Ghost creates a small-sized diversion, disturbs a few uninformed minds, and then subsides for another Rip Van Winkle nap.

The source-documents that testify to the historicity of Jesus are just as reliable as those that testify to the reality of Confucius or Socrates or Prince Gautama; and far more numerous. Jesus was terribly real to Paul of Tarsus; and if the Gospels must be discredited so must Paul's Epistles. We have no more grounds for suspecting the New Testament than we have for suspecting Zenophon's Memorabilia, or the Phaedo of Plato. And when we read Pliny's description of "these

Christians" in his letter to Trajan: "They are accustomed to meet on a fixed day to sing a hymn to Christ as God, and pledge themselves by a solemn oath to abstain from theft or robbery, and from adultery, perjury, and dishonesty," it seems fairly obvious that Christ was an actual figure in history at least to Pliny and the Emperor.

But we can understand that there are, always, a class of people who would be thankful to be rid of Jesus once for all, and would rejoice at any plausible excuse for laughing him off the earth as a mere myth. He is so discomforting. Their own moral and spiritual laziness makes them wince and cringe at the bare possibility that once upon a time he might have actually lived, and actually taught mankind his gospel. We are intelligent creatures; we are capable of proper self-direction; moral responsibility is a burden which we can and must bear; just as "thy faith hath made thee whole" of thy blindness or palsy, so nothing but our own faith in our inherent will-power can make us whole of our sins and fit for heaven; the important thing in God's judgment is not what we do, but what we are; what we are is a strictly non-negotiable commodity that permits of neither proxy nor substitute; in short, if we want to go to heaven no power on earth or in heaven can get us there except our own self-disgust and self-reformation, our own faith and endeavor, our own daily prayer and daily effort, our own triumphant self-respect and self-control.

All such teaching, which was plainly the teaching of Jesus, and which strives to remind us of our own manhood, and bids us live up to its possibilities, is, to this class of people, almost brutal in its frankness and truth. They find it so much more comforting to think that its reputed author never existed, and that the stinging words were never spoken.

Our Ghost will always find listeners and followers. But even within the memory of our octogenarians mankind has taken such a tremendous forward step in self-knowledge, self-confidence, and self-respect, that we are finding it necessary to speak of him no longer as man but Modern man. And with Modern man Jesus of Nazareth is just beginning after nineteen centuries to come into his own. Jesus lived his brief life in a pathetic longing for "ears to hear" what he had to say. There were plenty of ears to hear the sound of his words, but none to comprehend the communication. Now for the first time his longing bids fair to be granted. Modern man has the ears to hear him with understanding. Modern man has the spirit to recognize his truth and purity. Modern man has the heart to accept him and love him as the Way, the Truth, and the Light. His disciples today are of a new type. He will communicate with them in their language and to their condition. In their loving loyalty he will be securely enthroned for untold years to come.

Contributed

PRAYER
Christmas Morning

O Lord most Holy: with eager gratitude we come to thy house, knowing that only in words of prayer can we find adequate expression for our burden of thanksgiving, and only in thy presence can we offer true hospitality to the hopes and praises that crowd our spirits. We come in the confidence that thou wilt sanctify unto us the meaning and the message of our Christmas Morning; that thou wilt make more clear and winning its invitation. We thank thee for the precious occasions of friendliness and good-will which this day brings us; for its mood of sympathy and solicitude; for its smiles and greetings, its words of affection and deeds of kindliness.

We pray that, deeper than these occasions there may be a meaning for our souls, a new conviction of thy love for us, a new vision of thy holy purpose, and a new understanding of thine eternal truth to brighten and beautify our lives. Grant of thy mercy that this deeper meaning of the day may break upon us as a great flood of light. Let not that light spare us its searching revelations; let it expose our weakness and folly and sin; let it illumine our self-betrayal and perversity. But let it also brighten our hope, and glorify our joy. Let it above all transfigure for us the thought of our Christ, that we may honor him with heart-felt fervor, and love him with all the strength of our nature.

With that light shining in our hearts, may we go forth from this place to homes and firesides, to friends and dear ones, to memories and silent thoughts, to labors and responsibilities, fortified in faith and courage, and deepened in trust and reverence. Give us the insight to discover something of the innocence of the Christ-child in every child; to discern something of the purity of that gentle Mother in every woman; and to find in all men something of that nobility of manhood which Christ found, and for which he gave his life. Be with us, and our dear ones far and near; bless us all, and hold us close to thyself. Thine be the glory: *Amen.*

CHRISTMAS – THEN AND NOW

For preventing disorders arising in severall places within this jurisdiction, by reason of some still observing such festivalls such as were superstitiously kept in other countrys, to the great dishonnor of God and offence of others, it is therefore ordered by this Court and the authority thereof, that whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing of labour, feasting, or any other way, upon such accounts as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for every such offence five shillings, as a fine to the county. (Massachusetts Records, May 11, 1659).

Our Puritan forefathers took a dim view of the traditional holy days of the Christian church. John Calvin had, on at least one occasion, observed Christmas day in Geneva by preaching a sermon but his English disciples erased the day from their calendars and after their arrival in New England determined to forbid its observance by all such as would still mark the day "to the great dishonnor of God and offence of others."

Puritanism in its zeal to reform the church and recover pure Christianity looked upon all festivals and saints' days of the mediaeval church as prompted by Satan and calculated to corrupt the souls of men. It has been said that the unpardonable sins in the Puritan decalogue were idleness and sloth. And what was Christmas but another excuse to idle away one's time in feasting and revelry? Judge Samuel Sewall for many years Boston's homespun jurist and longtime deacon of its Third Church (now the Old South), takes occasion over a period of nearly forty years to comment in his diary upon the purity of Boston in the matter of Christmas keeping:

December 25, 1685. Carts came to Town and Shops open as usual. Some however observe the day but are vexed I believe that the Body of the People profane it, and blessed be God, no authority yet to compell them to keep it.

December 25, 1697. Snowy day: Shops are open and Carts and Sleds come to Town with Wood and Fagots as formerly, save what abatement may be allowed on account of wether . . . From the 4th verse of the 16th Psalm I took occasion to dehort mine from Christmas-keeping.

December 25, 1724. Shops are open, Carts, Sleds, Horses come to town as aforetimes.

The opposition, however, gradually declined throughout the Seventeenth Century. The Anglicans, who were steadily increasing throughout New England, usually observed the day while the spirit of Christmas found its way more and more into the hearts of the sons and daughters of the Puritans particularly as the stern Calvinism of the past began to mellow and soften with the emerging warmth of what was soon to become the Unitarian movement. Disputes now centered around the nature and duties of the day. One Elder Elias Lee, a Baptist clergyman, and Rev. Ammi Rogers, an Episcopal rector, carried on a long and acrimonious exchange of letters in the *Saratoga Register* during the year 1799. Their difference arose over whether or not the twenty-fifth of December was the precise date of Christ's birth. Lee was skeptical about the exact date, while Rogers affirmed categorically that the day and the month are beyond question. Lee was obviously following the Puritan line and, by discrediting the traditional date, intended thereby to discourage the observance of it. Again in 1816 a similar dispute arose in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and was published in the form of another exchange of letters in the local *Newburyport Herald.* The disputants seem to have been the local Presbyterian or Congregational minister and the Episcopal rector, the former designating himself as "Philo" and the latter as "Inquirer." The arguments this time are concerned with whether or not it is mandatory upon Christians to observe Christmas. Philo pointed out that (1) the angels celebrated it by descending on that occasion, (2) it was observed from the days of the martyrs to the usurpation of Oliver Cromwell and, a somewhat startling argument in a religious controversy, (3) the United States Congress and the State Legislatures observe the day by adjourning. Inquirer, on his side, has no objection or scruples about "devoutly commemorating the day" but argues that its observance is not a matter of divine appointment.

Christmas was now on its way to becoming accepted by the New England Puritans. It was no longer a sin to observe the day. Perhaps it is not mandatory, but even the Inquirer of 1816 is agreed that some notice of the day is not out of order. By the middle of the century some of the Boston churches like King's Chapel and the First Church had begun to observe the Christmas season by decorating their sanctuaries with appropriate evergreens. But even so, Christmas was a long time coming to rural New England. It smacked of the Papists and it was, moreover, a little too joyous for the austerity of the older generation. Then, too, it followed so close upon the festival of Thanksgiving that it seemed hardly decorous to gather the kinfolk together so soon for feasting. Nor was it likely that the true understanding of Christmas would dawn upon the New England consciousness so long as children were to be seen and not heard, to obey and not to play, for Christmas must ever be a day of children's laughter and merriment.

We owe many debts to our Puritan forefathers. They gave us a noble heritage and for that we must forever be grateful. But some

things they could not understand and Christmas was one of them. The Christ child to them was the remote second person in the Trinity giving himself on the Cross in a blood sacrifice for the propitiation of the sins of an utterly depraved humanity—so depraved that even that blood sacrifice could avail only for the handful of souls which a wrathful God had in his good pleasure already decided to elect unto salvation. Such a Christ-concept had no place for the simple manger scene with the babe and his very human mother. The moving beauty of that night in Bethlehem around which the Gospel writers were to weave their immortal stories—this was too natural, too simple, too human for legalistic theologians to understand. It was reserved to us in later centuries to recover Christmas and the babe at Bethlehem.

At the Christmas season we may discover the Christ child anew and, for a brief space of time, we may return to the manger with the wise men of old. It were better far that this spirit should pervade our every day, but ours is a world where the heavenly chorus is drowned amid the harsh noises of man's striving and the simple Bethlehem story is too easily overshadowed by the mighty tales of man's self-seeking. Yet for a little time we can become as little children, we can go to Bethlehem, we can sing with the angel host, we can catch the vision of the Christ child and his message for us.

> For they who to their childhood cling,
> And keep their natures fresh as morn,
> Once more shall hear the angels sing,
> Today the Prince of Peace is born!
>
> *(James Russell Lowell,* 1884*)*

PRAYER
The New Year

We come before thee, O God, at our little division of time, with minds full of sober thoughts and deep cravings. Because thou art Ancient of Days, and because we are frightened by the swiftness of our little day, we appeal to thee for thy promise that all worthy things are safe with thee. We seek thy guidance to live rightly this life of earth, to desire its enduring treasures, to recognize its true opportunities. Wilt thou arouse us from all slumber of the spirit, and make us instant in service and trust and prayer. Accept our gratitude for the year that is past. Touch our gratitude with wisdom and humility, that we may thank thee not alone for the obvious blessings the year has contained, but also for the apparent pains and afflictions within which thy deeper blessings are concealed. We thank thee for happiness and success, for fair skies and sunshine, for health and beauty, for prosperity and love, for peace and safety. Make us brave enough and trustful enough to thank thee also for failure and disappointment, for the punishment thou hast meted out unto our sin, for adversity and its discipline, for the earthly poverty and problem that have turned our faces unto thee. Grant that into our new year we may take strength of heart, enlightened minds, a more valiant spirit. Give our purposes a greater tenacity. Purify our pleasures and ambitions. And, as we crave for our fleeting days some foundation of permanence, teach us the spirit's wisdom to find that permanence in thee, in thy purposes of eternal good, in thy service and thy victory. Help us to make our living a part of thy truth, our choosing a part of thy thought, our laboring a part of thy hope, and so grant us to clothe our mortality with the beauty that passeth not away—a Christlike consecration unto thyself. Thine be the glory: *Amen.*

SOME WORDS FOR THE FIRST PARISH ON THE OCCASION OF OUR CALLING A NEW MINISTER

Nearly everyone at one time or another becomes a collector—whether as a child collecting marbles or birds' eggs or postage stamps—or as grown-ups collecting pewter, etchings or first editions.

Wasn't it one of Wodehouse's characters, "Doggy Trevor," who collected little china dogs?

Then there are those who collect less tangible things—things of the imagination and ideas—sometimes we call them philosophers, poets, dramatists, artists, musicians—according to the medium in which they work.

Many collectors are misers who keep to themselves the treasures they have garnered; but others, the generous spirits, share their hoards gladly with all who are capable of receiving. Willingness to share is not all; there must be also the facility to arrange and set forth these precious things, make them not only accessible but interesting and stimulating, yes, even provocative. To do this is a gift from the gods.

There lies here in this parish a field well ploughed and harrowed, eager to receive good seed. As the rotation of crops brings to fruition

latent capacities in the soil, so a new and different emphasis, a fresh interpretation, liberal, humane, and deeply spiritual may bring a new response. He will bring to us his own collection, perhaps not so much new as different, and we await with pleasant anticipation his arrangement and his interpretation of those ancient but enduring thoughts, old but ever new in application. We cannot but feel a sense of challenge to our own selves in facing a change of leadership. Shall we meet it with minds open and responsive? We shall not get without giving.

A little boy with his father was looking at a beautiful collection of shells. The lad asked about this one and that one, whence they came, what kind of creature once inhabited each one. Carefully he held one after another in his hand. Finally he came to the big conch shell, and turned it this way and that. His father said: "If you will hold this big shell close to your ear, you may hear what sounds like the rote of the sea-waves on a far-away shore; but to hear it you must listen carefully." We have a chance to hear that message from a far-away shore—reverberations of the deep wisdom of God—reinterpreted by a new voice, if we do our own part and really listen.

Reprinted by permission from the *Weekly Bulletin* of the First Parish in Milton.

GOING TO BETHLEHEM

Christmas is the season of mingled emotions and moods. There are the lights and the tinsel; giving and receiving gifts; the hearty exchange of good wishes and merrymaking; children feverish with the excitement of anticipation, and parents weary but happy. Christmas is the happy season.

Beneath all of our festive activities is there not at least a hint that Christmas is the season for hope, the time for discovering new courage? Lost somewhere in all its wonder is the message that contains the answers to those bewildering questions our hearts ask. Somehow we are compelled to believe that there is, after all, a pattern in which our living has its part.

Familiar things carry with them their own sort of danger—a danger that they will become so familiar they finally cease to speak to us at all. This can so easily happen when we approach the traditional literature of Christmas and hear again the lovely words of the Gospels and sing the carols beautiful in their simplicity. Yet, coming, as it does, at the year's ending, Christmas gives us the promise that a fresh beginning is possible. All the hopes and dreams, the failures and disappointments and frustrations that combine to describe our living—all are brought together and consecrated by the benediction of this holy season. We almost dare to believe that the Wise Men who followed Bethlehem's star and paid homage to a babe were, in spite of the shrewd judgment of the world, wise, indeed. It was a rash and foolish thing to journey so far, scarcely knowing for what. But who of us is not tempted to put aside some of our practicality and yield to that impulse that beckons us to the road of high adventure? Who of us does not wish for the courage to follow some star in search of a manger with its cradled babe?

How suggestive are the words from St. Luke's Gospel put in shepherds' mouths: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass . . ."! Without further adieu these simple shepherds, as if the full significance of the occasion was known to them, left their work to go and see for themselves what had happened on that strange and wonderful night.

Does it not strike you as curious that in a world such as ours there is still time for Christmas? If we are to believe all that we are told about our present generation Christmas cannot possibly have any meaning for us. We are told that ours is an age of materialism, an age when men and women are more concerned with shrewd calculation and tough-mindedness, when science rather than poetry rules the day. Christmas emphatically denies it! It is the great revelation of the human spirit. We still hope and dream and find within our hearts convictions and a faith that material interests can never explain. The materialism of our age is not as thorough-going as we are urged to believe. We still have faith! No matter how concerned we have become with the world of competition, of getting and spending, our hearts become restless at Christmas until we, too, would gladly follow that star of hope into the future. The great hope is just this—that Christmas in its simplicity touches every one of us and puts in our hearts a great longing to find something better—something that gives completion and fullness to our living.

What is it that we are seeking? We can give but imperfect expression to it for the speech of the heart is an unfamiliar language to us. Nearly two thousand years ago shepherds and wise men alike, the sophisticated and the humble, made their way to Bethlehem and knelt before

a little child. Here is the answer, for on this Christmas we, too, would kneel in the presence of a little child's innocence and say: "Little Child, we will make for you a world worthy of your confidence, if you will show us how." Yes, if we but had the courage, this year we would be among those who follow the Star that leads to the Kingdom of God. Why? Because that Child, as does every other child in its innocence, has captured our imaginations. We can never really free ourselves from the memory of Jesus who persistently taught and demonstrated the simple virtues of decency and loyalty and brotherliness. Struggle as we will for success and position, for satisfaction from pleasure, for easy honors, we are yet held captive by the Christ child.

The Magi and the simple herdsmen came bearing whatever gifts there were at hand to give. We, too, must bring an offering to the Bethlehem Manger. If among our gifts we can give hope, where hope is lost, and faith that will endure all this year and a thousand more; if among our gifts there is love and friendship, the wrappings of our gifts will matter little. These are the only gifts that matter in a perplexed and uncertain world. Without them there will be no Christmas this year.

But how in our weakness can we really keep Christmas this year? How can we free it from sham and mockery? Where can we find the courage and steadfastness for that Bethlehem Journey? Our symbol is the Star. Robert Frost has given us the answer to our question when to the star he says:

> Say something to us we can learn
> by heart, and when alone repeat.
>
> . . . .
>
> It asks a little of us here.
> It asks of us a certain height,
> So when at times the mob is swayed
> To carry praise and blame too far,
> We may choose something like a star
> To stay our minds on and be swayed.*
>
> —CHARLES C. FORMAN

* Poem entitled "Choose Something Like a Star."

THE COMMUNITY GLOW

Stand on the top of any sizable hill any dark night and you will see here and there on the horizon a low-lying glow of light. You will know that each glow marks the location of a city, and is made by the thousands of street lamps, automobile head-lights, neon signs, and shop windows in that city. It is bright or dim according to the brightness or dimness of its constituent sources. As a whole it makes a corona of diffused light which illuminates the darkest alley, and helps the wayfarer to find his way. In war times the most important thing is to "black-out" that glow.

There is another glow that hangs over every community, howbeit invisible to eyes of flesh. This invisible glow represents the quality, the stamp, the index of that community's moral, spiritual, cultural life, and is a sort of composite sum-total of the several thousand individual characters who compose that community. Each individual helps to brighten it or bedim it. Once formed it becomes the matrix within which each individual is born, and grows, and aspires. From it proceed the strongest directives he may ever feel. Whether an achievement be something he may claim and brag about is a secondary question. Primarily he chooses the actions that "will go over big in this town"; and avoids the actions that "you can't get away with in this town."

One bit of public service that every last, least, humblest resident can perform is to so live that the influence of his life shall brighten, purify, and enrich the community glow of his community. This is a categorical imperative for our modern life from which no philosophical doubts, problems, or ambiguities can release any one of us.

Things cannot get out of their natures, or be or not be in spite of their constitutions. Rational existences in Heaven perish not at all, and but partially on earth: that which is thus once will in some way be always: the first living human soul is still alive, and all Adam hath found no period.

Sir Thomas Browne

Christ does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in his life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus.

Oscar Wilde

PASCAL:

Man is to himself the most wonderful object in nature; for he cannot conceive what the body is, still less what the mind is, and least of all how a body should be united to a mind.

Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity, and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. The order of thought is: to begin with self; and with its Author; and its end.

We never live, but we hope to live; and as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so.

It is incomprehensible that God should exist; and it is incomprehensible that He should not exist.

It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason.

The pleasure of the great is the power to make people happy. The property of power is to protect.

The strength of a man's virtue must not be measured by his efforts, but by his ordinary life.

If man is not made for God, why is he only happy in God?

Console thyself: thou wouldst not seek me, if thou hadst not found me.

We are potentially all things; our personality is what we are able to realize of the infinite wealth which our divine-human nature contains hidden in its depths. *W. R. Inge*

On account of him there have come to be many Christs in the world, even all who, like him, loved righteousness and hated iniquity. *Origen*

The Word of God became man that you also may learn from a man how a man becomes a God. *Clement of Alexandria*

In our present form of human consciousness the true self of any individual man is not a datum, but an ideal. *Josiah Royce*

Anything is free when it spontaneously expresses its own nature to the full in activity. *John Macmurray*

Freedom is to be in possession of oneself. *Hegel*

If the fool could persist in his folly he would become wise. *Blake*

In the coming world they will not ask me: "Why were you not Moses?" They will ask me: "Why were you not Zusya?" *Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol*

It is the chiefest of good things for a man to become himself. *Benjamin Whichcote*

Become what thou art. *Orphic Saying*

Our Cordial Christmas Greetings

Unitarian Christian Fellowship

To Members and Friends, Greetings!

An increasing number of people are joining the Unitarian Christian Fellowship because they find in this organization and its quarterly publication, THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN, a medium for preserving and strengthening the Christian essence of Unitarianism — an uncompromising belief in the reality of God and a hearty acceptance of the spiritual leadership of Jesus as our way of life.

In this period of religious bewilderment we feel urged to offer our religious convictions to the thought of our day; convictions based upon the words and spirit of one whose timeliness makes him, in spite of the intervening nineteen centuries, the most modern of modern men, and the paramount influence for bringing spiritual and moral order to our troubled world.

We invite you to join us in this modest service to our times which may prove to be a means by which Christianity, as we know it, will be preserved and handed down to the future generations. By signing and returning the enclosed blank with $2.00 you will become a subscriber to THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN and a member of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship for the current season.

We believe you will find THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN most interesting and helpful. Its aim is to be:

- *Not dogmatic, but suggestive.*
- *Not controversial, but provocative of your own thought.*
- *Not blindly conservative, nor defiantly radical, but always open-minded.*
- *An effort to seek the truth by preserving "all the good the past hath had," especially the words and personality of Jesus of Nazareth, and by reverently comparing notes with one another.*
- *In short, an intimate conversation in print.*

We extend a hearty welcome to all subscribers, old and new, large and small. However, in order that we may do full justice to the work in hand, we make an earnest appeal for the larger contributions.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES E. PARK, CARL A. SEAWARD, CONSTANT WENDELL

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP 102 MT. VERNON ST. BOSTON 8, MASS.

Name .....

Address .....

Enclosed:

☐ $2.00 for membership and magazine